

Church of the Holy Rood Ampney Crucis Gloucestershire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



November 2007

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Church of the Holy Rood, Ampney Crucis, Gloucestershire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

In July 2007 Oxford Archaeology (OA), carried out an archaeological watching brief at Church of Holy Rood, Ampney Crucis, Gloucestershire (NGR SP 0650 0189). The work was commissioned by Astam GBC on behalf of the Church Parish Council in advance of new drainage around the church. The watching brief revealed ground buildup around the north and east sides of the north Transept and Victorian reinterment of charnel. No evidence for any of the earlier phases of church construction was observed and no articulated inhumations were encountered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 In July 2007 Oxford Archaeology (OA), carried out an archaeological watching brief at Church of Holy Rood, Ampney Crucis, Gloucestershire (NGR: SP 0650 0189). The work was commissioned by Astam GBC on behalf of the Church Parish Council in respect of new drainage around the church.
- 1.1.2 A project brief was set by Julian Munby, Diocesan Archaeological Advisor to the Diocese of Oxford.
- 1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OA 2006a).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.1.4 The site is situated on the western edge of the village of Ampney Crucis, 4 km east of Cirencester (Fig. 1). The church is sited at the base of a shallow south facing slope at approximately 102 m above OD and measures 0.25 hectares in area. The underlying geology is Oxford Clay over Forest Marble (Geological Survey of England and Wales Sheet no. 235).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.1.5 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the WSI for the project (OA, 2006a) and is reproduced below.
- 1.1.6 The church contains features of all periods from the Saxon to the 19th century. A Saxon doorway is present in the north wall and early Norman windows can be seen either side. The north transept dates to the 14th century and the church has a 15th century bellcote and a west tower of the same date. Two restorations were undertaken in the 19th century (Very, 1999).
- 1.1.7 Excavations in the nave uncovered seven inhumations predating the construction of the 15th century tower. A Roman pottery sherd was also found (Gloucestershire SMR). In the area of the new drainage trenches there is a build up of land levels

(Thackray, 2002).

- 1.1.8 Earlier archaeological work on the site had shown the presence of articulated burials at a depth of 0.7 m adjacent to the north transept and a build up of ground levels around the north and east sides of the church (OA, 2006b).

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 1.1.9 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 1.1.10 To recover any artefacts from the excavated material.
- 1.1.11 To establish the location and depth of any burials which may be affected by the drainage works.
- 1.1.12 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 1.1.13 The trench for the new drain was hand excavated from the west side of the north transept to the north side of the doorway at the east end of the vestry. This was along the line of the earlier drain around the base of the church wall.
- 1.1.14 The trench measured approximately 0.5 m wide and the depth varied from 0.4 m deep at the western side of the north Transept sloping down to 0.9 m deep at the vestry door. The trench dug from the vestry door to connect to the main sewer measured 0.5 m wide by 1.2 m deep.
- 1.1.15 A plan showing the extent of the excavations was drawn at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2) and where recorded the sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All excavations and recorded sections were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was also made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 1.1.16 At the western end of the excavation (Fig. 3, Section 1) a layer of dark yellow-brown clay silt (5) was encountered at a depth of 0.2 m below the existing drainage channel. This material was very clean and may represent a layer of made ground. This was overlaid by a 0.25 m deep layer of dark brown clay loam (4), the present day topsoil and turf. Cut into the surface of this layer adjacent to the church wall was a 0.55 m wide by 0.2 m deep trench (3). This feature had a flat base and a steeply sloping northern edge. The bottom of the cut was filled by a 0.12 m deep layer of modern

hardcore, which formed a base for the modern concrete drainage channel (1).

- 1.1.17 The excavations cut through a raised area of ground to the north of the north Transept (Fig. 3, Section 2). The trench encountered a layer of yellow-brown silt clay (6) at a depth of 0.55 m below ground level. This deposit contained numerous small fragments of limestone and charcoal flecking and may represent a buried soil horizon. This was overlaid by a 0.3 m deep layer of dark yellow-brown clay silt, a continuation of layer 5. Overlying this was a 0.25 m deep layer of topsoil and turf, a continuation of layer 4.
- 1.1.18 During the excavation of the trench alongside the north wall of the vestry (Fig. 3, Section 3), a layer of yellow-brown silt clay (11) was encountered at a depth of 0.55 m below ground level. This deposit contained numerous small fragments of limestone and charcoal flecking and probably represents a continuation of the buried soil horizon, 6. The base of the base penetrated this deposit for a depth of 0.35 m but failed to determine its full extent. Overlying layer 11 was a 0.35 m deep layer of dark orange-brown clay silt (10). This was a very clean deposit and may represent a layer of made ground similar to 5.
- 1.1.19 Cut into the surface of this deposit was a shallow circular feature, 0.25 m deep with an approximate diameter of 1 m (9). The western edge and base of this pit were clearly defined, however the eastern edge was indistinct. It was filled with a grey-brown silt loam (8), which contained numerous pieces of charnel and some coffin fittings. (For a full description of the finds see 3.2, Finds). The size of the feature and the concentration of the material suggests that this was a deliberate re-interment of charnel, possibly that disturbed during the construction of the vestry in the 19th century. The pit was sealed by a 0.2 m deep layer of dark brown clay loam (7), the present day topsoil and turf.
- 1.1.20 A deeper, 1.2 m deep, trench was excavated from the vestry door, underneath the boundary wall and connecting to a existing foul water drain (Fig. 3, Section 4).
- 1.1.21 The top of the underlying bedded limestone (16) was encountered at a depth of 1.15 m below the current ground level. Overlying this was a 0.25 m deep layer of red-brown silt clay (15), a probable natural clay deposit. This was overlaid by a 0.45 m deep layer of orange-brown silt clay (14), a probable layer of colluvium. Sealing this deposit was a 0.28 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt (13). This produced numerous small fragments of limestone and some charcoal flecking suggesting that it is a buried soil horizon, possibly a continuation of layer 10. Overlying this was a 0.2 m deep layer of dark brown clay loam (12), the present day topsoil and turf.

3.2 Finds

Comments on charnel deposit by Ceri Boston

- 1.1.22 A discrete concentration of disarticulated human bone was located in the trench immediately to the north of the 19th century vestry extension (8). The spread measured approximately 1 m in length. In section it was evident that it extended further to the north beyond the limit of excavation. In section, there appeared a clearly demarcated concave edge to the bone deposit to the west, suggesting that the bone was contained within a shallow pit (9). The edge of the pit was less clear to the east, however.
- 1.1.23 The disarticulated bone contained the remains of numerous individuals (not quantified on site). These included adult males and females, newborns, infants and children of different ages. This mixture of ages and sexes is typical of parish churchyard assemblages.
- 1.1.24 Coffin fixing nails and coffin fittings were recovered from amongst the human bone. The latter included at least three iron grips and fragments of metal plate (some with stamped motifs of swirling foliage still distinguishable), which were either breastplates, lid motifs or grip plates. Decayed wood and corroded grip plate adhered to the reverse of the grips. The grips were made of iron and lacked the ornate cast designs so prevalent in many grip designs of this period (Litten 1991; Reeve and Adams 1993). Several shroud pins of copper alloy and iron were also recovered.

Interpretation

- 1.1.25 Burial within coffins did not become widespread until the post-medieval period. From the later 17th century, it became customary to upholster the lids and side panels of the coffin with baize or velvet, and to decorate them with upholstery studs (often arranged in complex patterns). Further decoration was added in the early 18th century by riveting stamped metal sheets (breastplates, lid motifs, escutcheons and grip plates) onto the coffin. These fittings were mass produced from the 1730s onwards, and were accessible to all but the most indigent (Litten 1991). Being seen to give a loved one a 'good send-off' was extremely important to the surviving family, and even the poor of the 18th and 19th centuries expended large sums on the funerals. Coffins varied significantly in cost, depending on their ornateness and the materials used in their construction. The coffin fittings found within the charnel deposit at Ampney Crucis were of iron (the cheapest material) and thus, probably originated from more humble burials of the period.
- 1.1.26 Given its proximity to the vestry extension and the presence of Georgian or early Victorian coffin fittings within the deposit, is quite probable that this deposit represented the reburial of a large number of interments disturbed during the vestry construction.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

1.1.27 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were encountered during the course of the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

1.1.28 The excavations showed the presence of deep deposits of made ground around the north transept. This material probably occurred as a consequence of excess spoil from burials being depositing in this area. There is the possibility that this material may have been generated during excavations for the new vestry in the 19th century. A lesser possibility is that it may be colluvium or hillwash from the land above the church, however the presence of the house and boundary wall would mitigate against this.

1.1.29 The buried soil horizon, layers 6, 11 and 13, probably represent a layer of earlier churchyard soil. Earlier work at the church (OA, 2006b) showed that the foundation trench for the north wall of the nave cuts this deposit showing that it was in existence during the 13th century.

1.1.30 The pit containing human charnel and 19th century coffin fittings probably relates to the construction of the vestry and represents either burials or earlier charnel displaced during the excavation of the vestry foundations.

1.1.31 No articulated inhumations were encountered during the course of the excavations, and no evidence for any of the earlier phases of the churches construction was observed.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Structure	0.12 m	0.55 m	Concrete drainage channel	-	C20th
2	Fill	0.15 m	0.45 m	Hardcore	-	C20th
3	Cut	0.25 m	0.55 m	Cut for drainage channel	-	C20th
4	Layer	0.2 m	-	Present day topsoil and turf	-	C20th
5	Layer	0.35 m	-	Made ground	-	C19th ?
6	Layer	> 0.2 m	-	Buried soil horizon	-	Medieval ?
7	Layer	0.2 m	-	Present day topsoil and turf	-	C20th
8	Fill	0.2 m	1.0 m	Fill of pit 9	Human bone, iron coffin fittings	C19th
9	Cut	0.2 m	1.0 m	Pit dug for re-interment of charnel	-	C19th
10	Layer	0.3 m	-	Made ground	-	C19th ?
11	Layer	> 0.3 m	-	Buried soil horizon	-	Medieval ?
12	Layer	0.2 m	-	Present day topsoil and turf	-	C20th
13	Layer	0.3 m	-	Buried soil horizon	-	Medieval ?
14	Layer	0.45 m	-	Colluvium	-	-
15	Layer	0.25 m	-	Natural clay	-	-
16	Layer	> 0.1 m	-	Natural limestone	-	-

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Litten J 1991 *The English way of death- the common funeral since 1450*; Robert Hale, London

Reeves J and Adams M 1993 *The Spitalfields Project- across the Styx; Vol.1*; CBA Research Report **85**

Thackray, D (Dr) 2005 *Ampney Crucis, the Church of the Holy Rood. Brief for archaeological evaluation and recording.*

Very, D and Books, A 1999 *The Buildings of England, Gloucestershire: The Cotswolds*. Penguin, Harmondsworth

IFA, 2001 *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

OA 1992 *Fieldwork Manual*, (Ed. D. Wilkinson, first edition, August 1992)

OA 2006a *Church of the Holy Rood, Ampney Crucis, Gloucestershire Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

OA 2006b *Church of the Holy Rood, Ampney Crucis, Gloucestershire: Archaeological Watching Brief Report*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Church of the Holy Rood, Ampney Crucis, Gloucestershire

Site code: AMCHR 07

Grid reference: SP 0650 0189

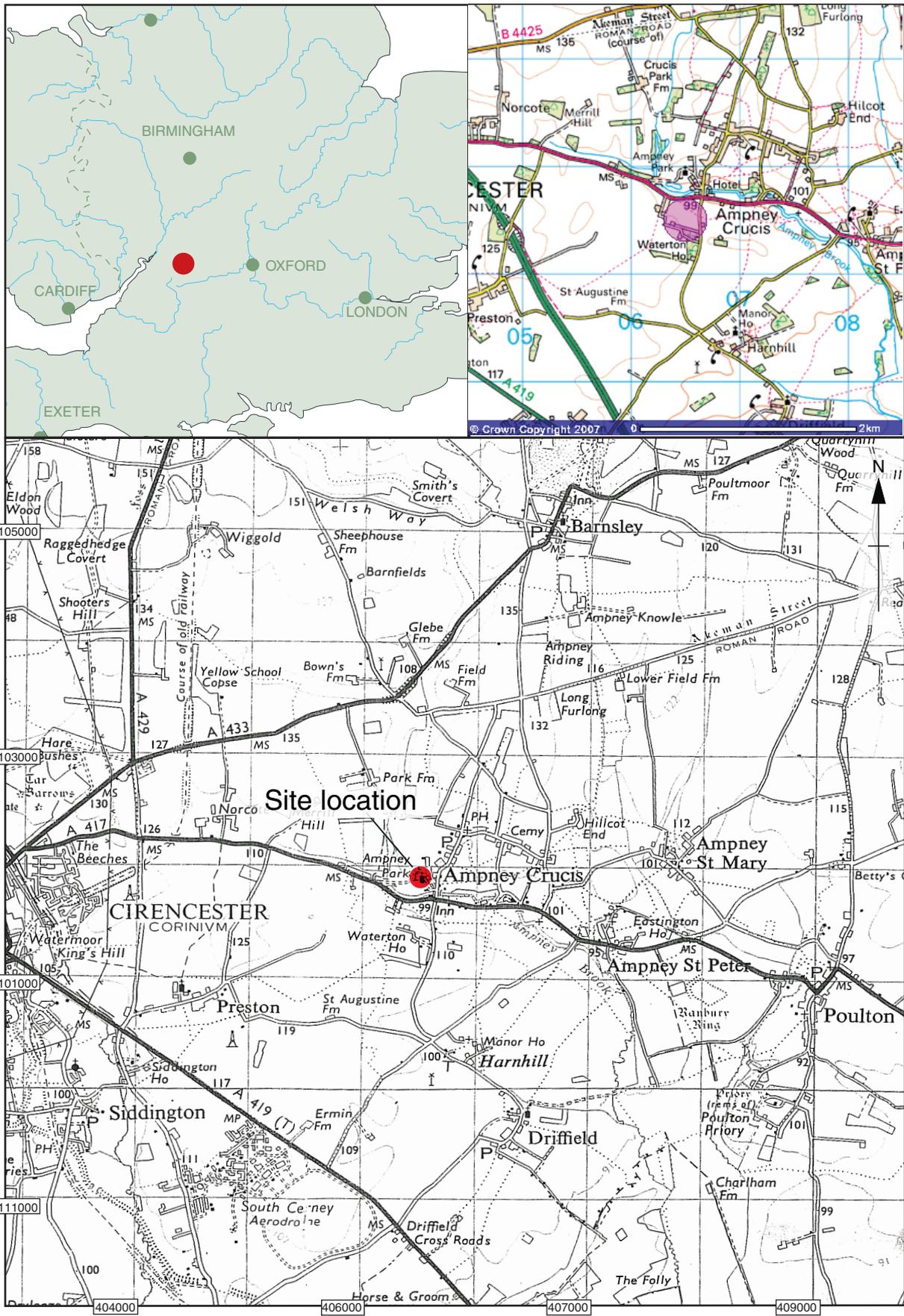
Type of watching brief: Hand excavation of drainage trench

Date and duration of project: July 2007, approximately 7 days

Area of site: 0.25 hectare

Summary of results: The watching brief revealed deposits of ground build up around the north and east sides of the north Transept and Victorian re-interment of charnel. No evidence for any of the earlier phases of church construction was observed and no articulated burials were encountered.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Corinium Museum in due course.



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Figure 1: Site location

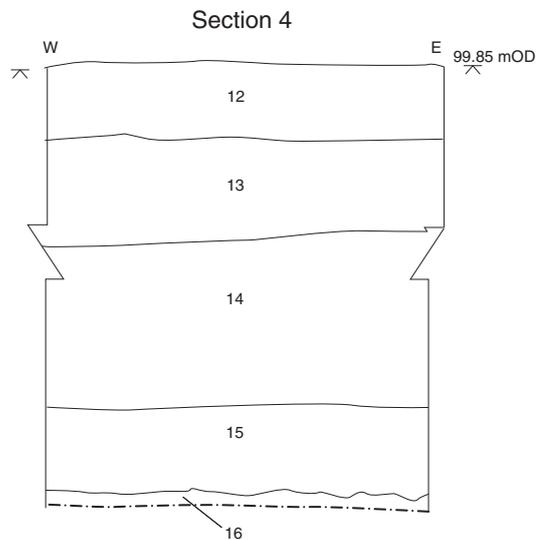
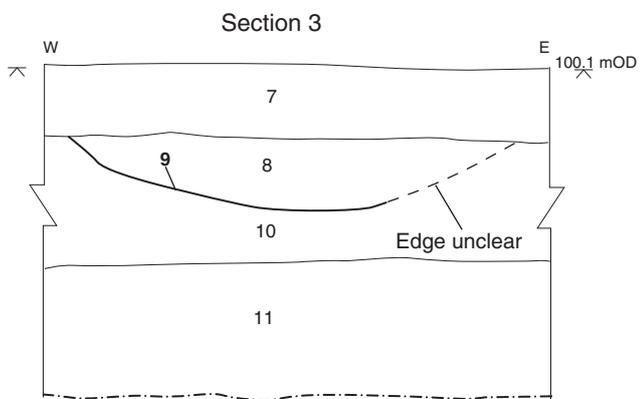
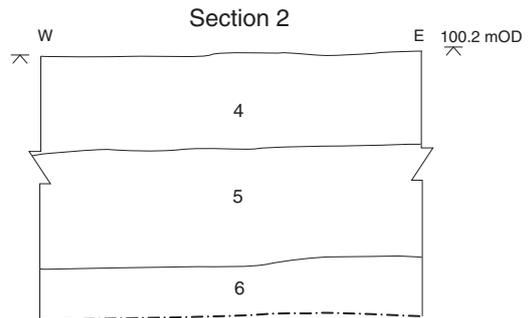
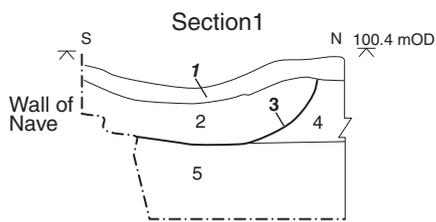
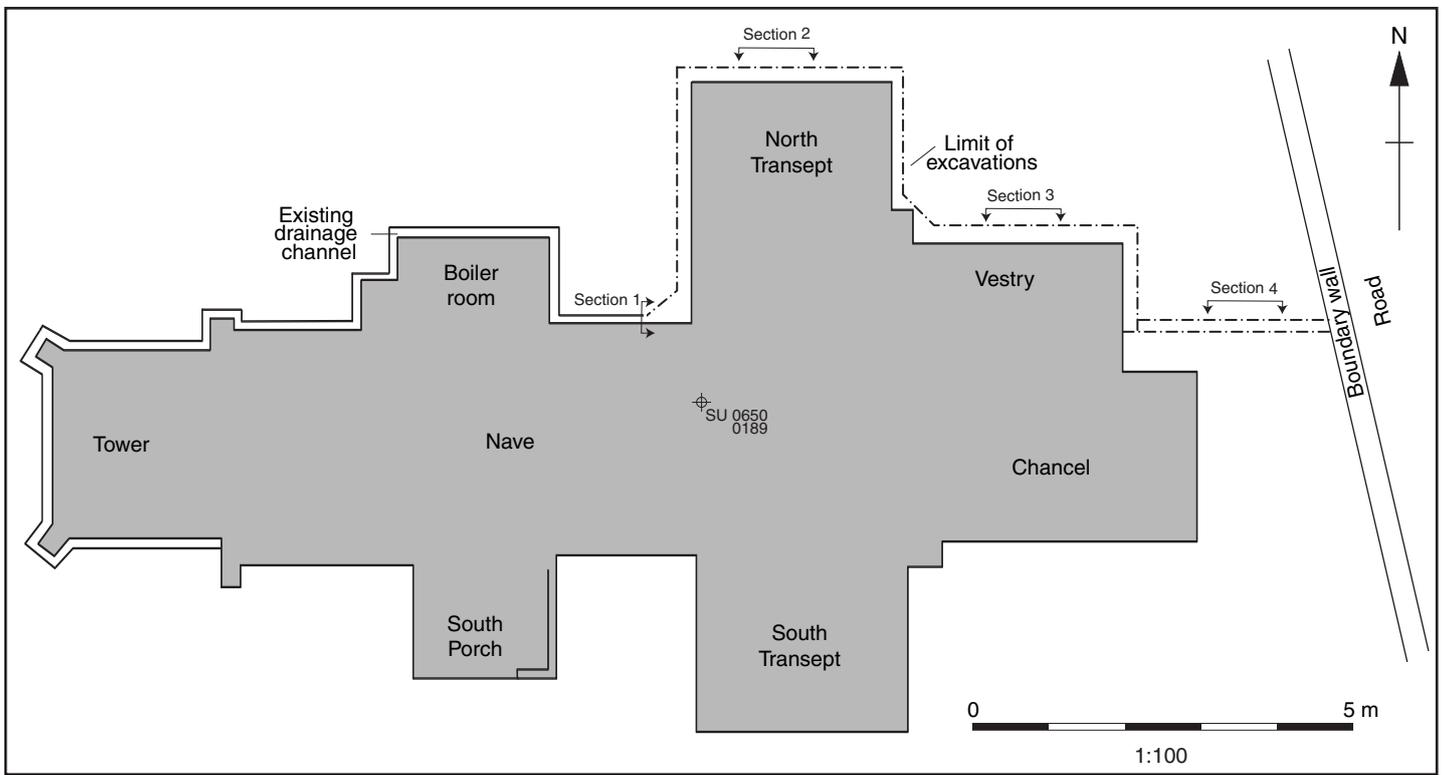


Figure 2: Site plan and sections